

Youth groups and street gangs in the Netherlands from 1985 to 2013

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Introduction

Youth groups have been present in the Netherlands in various appearances during the last three decades, and some of these could be considered gangs. Some of these groups have received a lot of media attention. For example, groups of Moroccan boys, emerging since the mid-eighties, are known to cause a lot of nuisance and to get into conflict easily with other people in their direct neighbourhood environment (Van Gemert 1998b; De Jong 2007). In the early-nineties, urban minority youth, mostly from Surinamese or Antillean descent, started to imitate American west-coast street gangs and call themselves Crips and Bloods (Van Gemert 1998a, 2001; Van Staple 2003). From the mid-nineties, groups of native Dutch youths with sympathies for the extreme right (formerly called 'Lonsdale groups' after a popular fashion brand) received some attention and some of them have been mentioned in relation to anti-migrant actions such as arson of mosques (Homan 2000; Van Donselaar 2005; Van Donselaar & Rodrigues 2004, 2006). Apart from these three very visible, but quite different, examples, there are many other groups of young people who spend a lot of time in public places and who are more or less involved in criminal behaviour or nuisance. They are often less distinctive and remain under the radar of the media, but also represent an important part of the gangs and youth groups in the Netherlands.

In recent years, youth groups involved in nuisance and crime have become a priority for the Dutch police and government. In May 2011, the Dutch Minister of Security and Justice ministry launched the 'Delinquent Youth Groups Action Program'. This program had two objectives. First, within two years measures will be taken to tackle all 89 criminal youth groups that were identified in November 2010 (cf. Ferwerda & Van Ham 2011). Second, the approach to tackle troublesome and nuisance groups will be intensified (EUCPN 2012: 34-37).

This contribution will describe developments of youth groups and street gangs in the Netherlands in the last three decades. The focus will be on those groups that are covered by the consensus definition of the Eurogang Program of Research, a network of gang researchers in European countries and the United States (see e.g. Klein et al., 2001; Decker & Weerman, 2005; Van Gemert et al., 2008; Weerman et al., 2009; Esbensen & Maxson, 2012). This consensus definition describes a street gang as: "any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity".

The description does not add up to a monolith picture: the street gang problem in the Netherlands has many faces and facets. Not only do youth groups and street gangs in the Netherlands vary in many respects, different research approaches and perspectives also focus on various aspects and features of these groups. We will start by presenting a general overview of three decades of Dutch research on gangs and youth groups. Next, we will draw a picture of the volume and characteristics of the street gang phenomenon in the Netherlands. In the final paragraph we will comment on Dutch policies on street gangs and youth groups.

Three decades of research on youth groups and gangs

An important part of Dutch research on youth groups is linked to immigration, ethnicity, socio-economic factors and neighborhood disorganization, factors that have been identified as important factors in the formation and proliferation of gangs in pioneer American gang studies from

the previous century (Thrasher 1927; Whyte 1943; Cohen 1955; Cloward & Ohlin 1960). These theoretical themes are still relevant in the Dutch context in which street gangs emerge. Further, gang research in the Netherlands developed in the context of events and developments in whole Europe. Hip hop and gangsta rap are a youth culture that has played an important role in the proliferation of American west coast gang stereotypes to European countries. There have been riots with involvement of gangs in the French banlieus, and more recently, in London. Especially in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, we have seen the emergence of extremist white power groups.

Early ethnographic studies on youth groups in the Netherlands appear in the eighties of the twentieth century. The first studies focus on street groups consisting of ethnic minority youths. In this period, Surinamese youngsters, arrived to the Netherlands after independence of the former colony in 1975, and addiction, especially to heroin, is a new and serious problem that involves the lives of many young immigrants (Buiks 1983; Van Gelder and Sijtsma 1988a; Sansone 1992). In the big cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, black Surinamese youngsters introduce the South American streetcorner life in certain inner-city quarters, and thus a niche for drug dealing is created.

In the period that follows, Moroccan youths become a second important immigrant group that is studied in relation to street groups and gangs (Van Gelder and Sijtsma 1988b; Kaufman and Verbraeck 1985; Werdmölder 1986, 1990). Their migration history goes back to the active recruitment of guest workers by Dutch companies in earlier decades. In particular Moroccan boys of the second generation, sons of these guest workers, spend a lot of time on the streets and get involved in crime and nuisance. At the end of the eighties reports about Moroccan street gangs in Amsterdam begin to appear (Loef 1988; Werdmölder 1990). In 1998, an ethnographic study of Moroccan youth in Rotterdam is published (Van Gemert 1998b), and in 2007 a more recent ethnographic study on Moroccan street youths and their street codes, conducted in Amsterdam, was published (De Jong, 2007).

In the nineties, Antillean youths are the next ethnic minority that receive attention in ethnographic research that also includes information about troublesome youth groups (Van Hulst & Bos 1993; De Jong, Steijlen & Masson 1997; Van San 1998). At the same time, youth groups in Dutch big cities, especially in The Hague, began to copy gangs like Crips and Bloods from the American West coast. In particular black Surinamese and Antillean youth were attracted to these groups, informed by international hip hop culture with often African-American role models. This phenomenon received attention in several studies. One study used archival documentation to describe three criminal Crips gangs and their characteristics (Van Gemert 1998a) and in an ethnographic study on Antillean youth also addressed several groups of Crips and Bloods (De Jong et al. 1997). A later book (and movie) from a journalist documents the rise of the Crips groups in The Hague in more detail (Van Stapele, 2003; see also Roks & Staring 2008).

In the mid-nineties, the police of the The Hague region began to show particular interest in youth groups. Several years in a row they produced an inventory of these groups in the area by doing a survey among policemen on the beat. These studies employed a distinction in groups that are only troublesome, groups that cause nuisance, and criminal youth groups (Van Oosterwijk 1995). This distinction surfaced again later in Dutch research and policy. A small number of the groups was labeled 'jeugdbende', the Dutch equivalent of street gang, and according to the police researchers these could be found in all three categories of youth groups (Ibid. 1995:44). Over the years, however, the definition of 'jeugdbende' used by the police in the Hague changed gradually (Gruter et al. 1996:7; Gruter 1997:20; Van Solm and Rotteveel 2000:2). At first,

shared identity and criminal activities are key elements, and a link to immigration is implicit. Later, the focus is on levels of organization and offending.

At the end of the twentieth century, the Dutch Ministry of Justice orders a study to develop an instrument for inventorizing youth groups nationwide. This instrument, called the 'Shortlist', is to some extent a newer version of the instrument that was used earlier by the police in The Hague (Beke et al. 2000). It is a survey among policemen who regularly work in a neighborhood, and it is comparable to the Eurogang Expert Survey, an instrument that was developed independently (see Weerman et al., 2009). Nowadays, the Shortlist is used by police forces nationwide and everywhere in the Netherlands a distinction is made between troublesome, nuisance and criminal groups.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a number of studies appeared that were inspired by the Eurogang Program of Research. This network of researchers developed a consensus definition of street gangs, and produced four volumes of research findings and several standardized research instruments, in particular an ethnography guideline, an expert survey questionnaire, and a youth survey questionnaire (see Weerman et al., 2009; see also www.umsl.edu/ccj/eurogang/euroganghome.html).

The Eurogang ethnography guidelines were applied in a study in Amsterdam-West (Van Gemert & Fleisher 2002, 2005). This study used observations, archival material, open interviews and informal conversations to analyze a group of Moroccan boys (about 25 core members) that often hung out at a particular square. The group easily got into conflict with shopkeepers and citizens from the neighborhood, and members were involved in offending, ranging from petty crime to serious offenses. Interestingly, the group was loosely organized and structured, but at the same time exerted an important influence on the lives and behavior of its members.

The Eurogang Expert Survey was used to study the prevalence of street gangs in the city of Amsterdam (Van Gemert 2005). More than 100 policemen on the beat were interviewed or returned a questionnaire. The method is comparable to that of the Shortlist, however, the questionnaire employs a relatively objective method to arrive at a categorization of street groups and gangs. The study provided figures about the numbers of youth groups and street gangs in the city and their distribution over the neighborhoods, and information about the make-up of groups and gangs in the inventory.

The Eurogang Youth Survey was employed in a study among more than 1,500 secondary school students in the province of South-Holland, including the city of The Hague (Weerman, 2005; Weerman, 2012). This study provided information about the proportion of lower educated boys and girls that were members of youth groups or street gangs in the Netherlands, about several basic characteristics (composition, organizational features, use of names, group member's involvement in delinquency), and about risk factors for gang membership among these youths.

A few core questions from the Eurogang Youth Survey were also included in the questionnaire of the ISRD (the International Self Report Delinquency study), which was also conducted in the Netherlands (Junger-Tas et al., 2011; Gatti & Haymoz, 2011). This study offered information about the prevalence of street gangs in the Netherlands in comparison to other countries (see below).

Prevalence of Dutch youth groups and street gangs

In the eighties and nineties there have been a number of isolated studies on youth groups and street gangs in the Netherlands. Some included local inventories, but none of these have led

to estimations of the phenomenon on a national level. This changed after the introduction of the Shortlist that was developed on demand for the ministry of Justice. This instrument was increasingly used by police forces all over the country, and nowadays it is even mandatory. The data gathered by separate police forces can be easily combined to present national statistics on youth groups, but initially this was never done. A few years ago journalists saw an opportunity to get this information and presented an initial summation of these police figures. These estimations were probably incomplete, but more importantly the terminology that was used departed from the official language. The very neutral term ‘youth groups’ was replaced by ‘jeugdbende’ (street gang) and all of a sudden there were screaming headlines: “Almost 1800 ‘jeugdbendes’ in the Netherlands”. All of a sudden, there seemed to be a big street gang problem, if one would believe these headlines.

In contrast to what these media reports may suggest, the question whether a category of youth groups can be called ‘street gangs’ has been much under debate in the Netherlands. In general, policy makers were very hesitant to use the word ‘gang’ (or the Dutch equivalent ‘jeugdbende’), because of its associations with ‘American situations’. Though this policy may have prevented unnecessary moral panics, but it obviously has a boomerang effect when misinterpretation of wording leads to alarming numbers (Van Gemert 2012). The Shortlist is also hesitant in its terminology, but it does make use of the words ‘jeugdbende’ and ‘straatbende’. However, these words are restricted to so-called ‘plus variants’ of respectively nuisance groups and criminal groups (Beke et al. 2000:132-3; Ferwerda & Kloosterman 2004:15). ‘Jeugdbende’ is defined as “a criminal youth group that does not operate in public, but goes underground and starts to belong to organized crime” (Beke et.al. 2000:133). As a result, formally there is little mention of youth gangs, because the word is attached to very serious groups that are found only seldomly.

After the media made use of (and distorted) the police figures, it was decided that the national numbers would be provided every year by the authorities themselves. Starting with data from 2009, each year a study is published that summarizes the findings with the Shortlist instrument over all regions in the Netherlands (Ferwerda & Van Ham, 2010; 2011; 2012). This study counts all troublesome, nuisance and criminal youth groups in different police regions in the Netherlands, and again distinguishes the two special categories of street and youth gangs. In the years covered by these studies, the total number of troublesome youth groups reported by police officers varied from (1379 to) 1760 to 1527 to 1165. ‘Jeugdbendes’ are also included, but only 10, 6 and 5 were reported in these consecutive years.

Table 1. Youth group categories in the Netherlands from Shortlist 2008 - 2011

<i>Youth groups</i>	<i>2008*</i>	<i>2009**</i>	<i>2010***</i>	<i>2011****</i>
Troublesome	1192	1341	1154	878
Nuisance	117	327	284	222
Criminal	70	92	89	65
Total	1379	1760	1527	1165
‘jeugdbende’	unknown	10	6	5

*([http://www.rtl.nl/\(actueel/rtlnieuws/binnenland\)/components/actueel/rtlnieuws/2010/01_januari/06/verrijkingsonderdelen/jeugdbendes_cijfers.xml](http://www.rtl.nl/(actueel/rtlnieuws/binnenland)/components/actueel/rtlnieuws/2010/01_januari/06/verrijkingsonderdelen/jeugdbendes_cijfers.xml))

** (Ferwerda & Van Ham 2010)

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These results suggest that the number of youth groups is decreasing in the last couple of years. Policy makers may interpret this finding as an indication that the increased attention to tackle these groups is successful. However, caution is needed. The Shortlist instrument is a relatively subjective method, dependent on the cooperation and judgments of police officers on the beat. It might be that the repeated demand to participate in the Shortlist method has caused some 'research fatigue' among the police officers in the field. Further, perceptions of seriousness and group characteristics may also differ between regions and change over time (Harland, 2011). In particular the 'plus variants' of 'jeugdbende' and 'straatbende' seem to be sensitive to local perceptions and policies. In this regard, it is illustrative that according to the Shortlist, there were none of these two categories in the major Dutch cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague, while in another city, Utrecht three were reported in 2009, but none in the following years (Ferwerda & Van Ham 2010, 2011, 2012).

It is difficult to compare the findings from the Shortlist with data that are gathered in other European countries or with the results from the annual US gang surveys. As mentioned, the Shortlist employs a very broad definition of youth groups, but a narrow one of 'jeugdbende', the Dutch equivalent of street gang. More useful for a comparative purpose is the Eurogang expert survey that has been conducted in the city of Amsterdam (Van Gemert, 2005). This study reported 39 street gangs according to the Eurogang definition in seven police districts of Amsterdam. Unfortunately, this study could not gather information about all neighborhoods in Amsterdam, which implies that the estimate is conservative. Because the use of the Eurogang expert survey has not been widespread yet in other countries, it is also not possible to compare the findings for Amsterdam with other places.

Another source on the prevalence of troublesome youth groups are Dutch surveys that included questions from the Eurogang Youth Survey instrument. Among a group of lower educated secondary school students, it appeared that about 6% were member of a street gang according to the Eurogang definition (Weerman, 2005). Interestingly, membership was not restricted to boys, although they were relatively more often involved in street gangs than girls (8% among the boys, 4% among the girls, see Weerman, 2012). These figures are not very different from those reported in other studies that have used the Eurogang Youth Survey (see Decker & Weerman, 2005; Van Gemert et al., 2008; Esbensen & Maxson, 2011), or in surveys about street gangs in the United States (see Esbensen & Weerman, 2005).

More comparative information was obtained by the ISRD study that included the core questions about gang membership in a collaboration of thirty different countries. In a representative sample of youths in two Dutch cities, 3.3% of the respondents indicated they were involved in a street gang that applied to the Eurogang definition *and* saw themselves as member of a youth gang (Gatti et al., 2011). This figure is comparable to the other samples in the international study, somewhat below the international mean of 4.4%. According to the Eurogang definition exclusively, 11.8 % of the Dutch sample belonged to a street gang (Maxson & Haymoz, 2011; personal information). These figures do not depart strongly from the other countries that participated in the study, which imply that the Netherlands does not stand out to other countries with regard to self reported gang membership. This is illustrated in table 2, which summarizes the findings regarding gang membership for a selection of countries that participated in the ISRD.

Table 2: Prevalence of gang membership in a selection of countries self reported by respondents of the ISRD (International Self Report Delinquency study)

	Member of gang according to Eurogang definition	Eurogang & also self defining as gang member
Netherlands	11.8 %	3.3 %
Belgium	9.7 %	6.4 %
Germany	12.1 %	5.3 %
Denmark	10.5 %	3.1 %
France	12.4 %	8.9 %
Spain	6.5 %	2.4 %
Hungary	9.9 %	6.5 %
Poland	16.3 %	3.3 %
U.S.A.	17.9%	3.1 %

Source: Gatti et al., 2011; Maxson & Haymoz, 2012; personal information from Haymoz (2011)

Characteristics of Dutch troublesome youth groups and street gangs

With regard to the nature of Dutch street gangs and youth groups, different sources are available: a large number of shortlist surveys, Eurogang expert survey, Eurogang Youth survey, and various qualitative accounts and ethnographies. Interestingly, these sources offer quite similar findings about key features of Dutch youth groups and street gangs. We address three of them: structural and organizational characteristics; territoriality and the relation to the neighborhood; and involvement in criminal behavior.

It appears that Dutch troublesome youth groups and gangs are small to medium in size. Most groups and street gangs have between 10-30 members in size (see e.g. Beke et al., 2000; Weerman & Esbensen, 2005; Van Gemert, 2005; Ferwerda & Van Ham, 2011). Large gangs, like the American traditional gangs or the gangs in some Russian and English cities, are rare. Further, most gangs do not seem to be exclusive when it comes to race or ethnicity. Many groups are mixed or allow members from other ethnic background than the majority.

Considering organizational characteristics, it is safe to say that most youth groups and street gangs in the Netherlands do not have a strict organization. In the expert surveys conducted among police officers, the majority of troublesome youth groups appear to be loosely organized and non hierarchical (Beke et al., 2000; Ferwerda & Van Ham, 2011). This picture was confirmed by the Eurogang expert survey conducted in Amsterdam: this study found no formal leadership or initiation rites, although some group members could take leading roles in certain situations (Van Gemert, 2005). Qualitative accounts of gangs and troublesome youth groups in the Netherlands present a similar picture of a loosely organized, non hierarchical group structure. In the Netherlands, most gang members appear to dislike formal rules and hierarchy, and members often say they would not accept somebody claiming to be a leader (see e.g. Van Gemert 1998b; De Jong, 2007). Also quantitative data from the Eurogang Youth Survey lead to the conclusion that Dutch youth groups are much less organized and structured than their American counterparts (Esbensen & Weerman, 2005). A minority of the Dutch gang youths indicate that their gang had features like leadership, gang rules, and symbols, while such characteristics were reported by a majority of American gang youths. These differences are further specified by the findings in table 3.

Table 3: Characteristics of troublesome youth group and gangs reported by Dutch and American youths

	Netherlands	United States
Regular meeting times	37%	58%
Rules within the group	38%	75%
Have to do something special to join / initiation rites	21%	80%
Established leaders	29%	76%
Colors / symbols	24%	92%
Subgroups / age groups	44%	38%

Source: Esbensen & Weerman, 2005

Further, it is striking that many Dutch gangs and youth groups do not use a name of their own and also do not have symbols like specific clothing or colors. This is not only reported in the quantitative study among school youth, but also in qualitative accounts of a more serious street gang in Amsterdam (Van Gemert & Fleisher, 2005). The groups that do adopt a name or a specialized style however, are often inspired by American gang culture, in particular via movies and gangsta rap. Among Dutch school youths, gang names often include reference to gang or criminality and violence (Weerman, 2005). From the nineties up until today, some street gangs, especially in The Hague and Amsterdam, have named themselves after the famous L.A. examples Crips and Bloods (see e.g. Van Gemert, 1998a; Van Staple, 2003; Roks & Staring 2008). More recently, the name MS13 pops up, probably because of popular documentaries. However, the use of this name does not imply that dangerous and violent gangs like this are present. Some of the groups that carry the name have certainly been involved in serious offending (like robbery), but most seem to be less or even not delinquent at all in nature. Some gang names have become brands that can be used to create an identity to impress others (Van Gemert, 2008).

While many gangs in other countries, in particular the United States, are territorial in nature, most Dutch gangs and troublesome youth groups are not. That does not mean that these groups do not have places where they regularly meet and hang out, and that they look upon as 'their own'. However, they do not defend these places to other groups and fights with rival gangs over 'turf' are very rare. In the Netherlands there are no accounts of gangs defending turf to warrant a market for street sales of drugs. Activities of troublesome groups don't have to be confined to their own neighborhood. Sometimes they go out and cause trouble in other places, in particular the city center (see e.g. Beke et al., 2000; Van Gemert & Fleisher, 2005).

In the Netherlands extremist white power groups are seldom found in the big cities, more often they seem to emerge in small cities surrounding them. Immigrants that these extremists consider the enemy don't live at close vicinity (Van Donselaar & Rodrigues 2006), but young people may have experiences from visits elsewhere, related to school or going out. Here too, there are seldom fights between opposing groups. On a few occasions members of these groups have set fire to mosks or Islamic schools (Van Gemert & Stuifbergen 2008).

Especially Moroccan youth groups easily get into conflicts with other people in the neighborhoods they hang out. They cause nuisance and trouble, and clash with citizens and shopkeepers, not seldom this starts just to beat boredom. Some of these conflicts lead to prolonged bullying, and they can cause local authorities to take strict measures. On other

occasions small incidents in neighborhoods are connected to bigger stories and stigmatized groups are blamed over and over again. In the city of Gouda, a bus driver was harassed and even though this had not happened in the neighborhood of Goverwelle, the bus company refused to make stops in this neighborhood, where many Moroccans live. Within days this was in the headlines of several national newspapers, and populist politician Geert Wilders suggested in parliament that the Dutch military should return from Afghanistan and sent to Goverwelle to restore order.

With regard to their involvement in illegal behavior and crime, it is obvious that street gangs are disproportionately responsible for crime and nuisance among youths. The qualitative accounts that are available show that members of certain groups can become involved in serious forms of crime and that sometimes this involvement escalates in lethal incidents, as became clear in recent years when a number of killings took place among gang youth in Amsterdam-Southeast. The last victim, known as 'Sin Quin', was killed in August 2012 and said to be a member of the Crips.

Expert surveys result in a varied picture of involvement in delinquency of troublesome youth groups in the Netherlands: the distinction of the three categories (troublesome, nuisance and criminal) from the shortlist is partly based on the seriousness of crime involvement. Some of the most serious category (the criminal youth groups) from these surveys are involved in serious forms of offending and sometimes in profitable drug crimes (Beke et al., 2000).

The Dutch youth surveys that have been conducted also show that Dutch members of street gangs are disproportionately involved in criminal activity. In general, those youth who are involved in these groups offend about three to four times more often than non-gang youths (Esbensen & Weerman, 2005; Gatti et al., 2011). This is even more outspoken for some types of crime, for example robberies, that are conducted ten times more often by gang members as by other youths (Klein et al., 2006). It is also interesting to note that while Dutch groups may differ from their American counterparts in organizational level, their level of delinquency appears to be very similar (Esbensen & Weerman, 2005).

Dutch gang policy: characterized by project variety

Nuisance from youth groups has become a major source for feelings of unsafety in the Netherlands. A number of surveys have shown increasing numbers of citizens who point their finger at youth groups hanging on the streets or in shopping malls as major sources of disorder and feelings of unsafety (Hoenson 2000; SAMS 2004). Even cinemas and swimming pools have repeatedly been reported as places in distress because of their presence.

Over the years, various projects have emerged to target youth group problems. Some have been evaluated, or are based on evidence-based projects in other countries (e.g. Van Gemert & Wiersma 2000), but most have been introduced based on experience or own initiative, and sometimes seemingly without much reflection beforehand. Currently, in the small country that the Netherlands is, at least 73 separate projects exist that are used in local policies of which 49 are specifically aimed at tackling youth groups. These projects are all presented on a website that is sponsored by the ministry of Justice (<http://www.wegwijzerjeugdenveiligheid.nl>).

Using various criteria one can distinguish (1) between the kind of youth group a project targets: troublesome, nuisance, or criminal; and/or (2) between targets on the individual, the group, and/or the place they are found; and/or (3) between means that are used: sport, work,

parents, neighborhood, and/or role models; and/or (4) between prevention and repression. Furthermore, in a number of these projects the police is a partner, in others they are not involved beyond the stage of identifying the group.

The projects that have been published on the website (and there are also many more local projects and approaches that have not been registered) are characterized by great variety in approach, sophistication and available evidence for effectiveness. Several projects are aimed at organizing activities, in particular sports activities for youths in troublesome groups, sometimes together with other neighbors. Some projects aim to get neighbors or family members involved in tackling nuisance of groups, or to get group members and neighbors together to enhance communication. Some projects aim at informing and training group members to increase prosocial behavior. Several projects try to organize outreaching methods to gain the trust of and support difficult to reach group members. Several projects are aimed at tackling individuals from the groups to help or treat them; other projects are aimed at the parents and families of youth group members. Finally, several projects adopt a more integrative approach and try to organize collaboration among local institutions to combine repressive and preventive measures. Again, evaluation research is often not available, but some of the projects are based on theoretical considerations. A small minority builds on evidence-based interventions from other countries.

Three large cities in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht, are known for having developed their own approaches of youth groups over the years. In Amsterdam, part of the approach is to register a list of the 600 most active juvenile delinquents and to give them full attention by following their tracks and contacting their parents. In Utrecht, an integrative approach is adopted in which collaboration takes place with justice and youth care. A distinguishing feature of this approach is that it tries to disentangle the group dynamics of the youth groups that are tackled, by singling out negative instigators in the group, joiners, and members with positive behavior that can become more or less rolemodels. In The Hague, also an integrative approach is chosen, with a distinctive feature that it aims to include the context and background of the problems caused by the group. The groups members' home situation is investigated explicitly and a mixture of repressive and preventive measures are chosen to intervene.

Because of the nationwide application of the Shortlist, one is tempted to say there is a 'Dutch model' in policing and tackling youth groups and street gangs. Such a common model is further stimulated by the Dutch government by giving advice and support to local authorities (municipalities). In 2010, a brochure has been published aimed at giving advice to local authorities how to tackle troublesome youthgroups (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2010). In this brochure, the Shortlist method is explained and a seven step plan is introduced to offer a guideline for local authorities to tackle troublesome youthgroups. The first step is 'prioritising and making an agenda', by employing the Shortlist and targeting the most problematic groups that are present. The second step is getting together a 'consultation body' of institutions involved in youth groups (e.g., the municipality, police, youthworkers). The third step is a problem analysis and 'unity in understanding' about the youthgroups that are targeted. The fourth step is to formulate an approach: this should be a multidimensional approach, than can include measures aimed at the group, the location and the individuals from the group. The fifth step is to execute the plan, the sixth to evaluate the approach, and the seventh step is to communicate about everything with prudence. These general advices seem to be appreciated by local authorities, however, they are also not evaluated by scientific research.

Recently, the Dutch ministry of Justice initiated an 'action program' to tackle the 89 most criminal youth groups in the Netherlands. Striking is the strong language that is used: rule breaking behavior of risk youths should be tackled strongly. In practice, the new policy comes with a special task force at the Ministry of Justice, support for local governments, and more intense coordinating efforts to react on criminal youth groups at various places. No new interventions are implemented, but more information is provided about existing programs and 'best practices' in the field. In general, the approach is formulated very vaguely, with a mixture of repression and intervention measures, without clear criteria when to use what. Currently, this action program is investigated to see which measures are taken in practice to tackle criminal youth groups.

In summary, it appears that the Netherlands is a special case internationally, because an instrument like the Shortlist that is applied all over the country generates data on youth groups and street gangs on a national level. Even though serious remarks can be made about this instrument (see above), there is probably no other country in Europe that can provide such nationwide data. The data from this inventory can be used to meet local ends and to prioritize youth groups for intervention. In practice, there is a great variety in projects that are used to intervene. In general, if a group is criminally active, the approach is relatively more repressive and the police and justice come into play, focused on a judicial approach of individuals within the groups. If the problem is less serious, preventive measures are more suitable, and these are usually carried out under supervision of the municipality.

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